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ABSTRACT

A college survival skills course, designed to help college-bound high school seniors develop an efficient, organized approach to college reading and study skills, is described in this paper. After outlining the steps taken in developing and promoting the course, the paper notes favorable reactions to it, lists the course textbooks, and describes the pre- and posttests administered to students. It then describes the course content, showing how it is designed to promote skills in the areas of systematic listening, note taking, development of college level vocabulary, studying for and taking college examinations, and scheduling and organizing time. It tells how guest lecturers, including students currently enrolled in college, are called upon to discuss a number of areas, including physical and social problems of college students; financial aid and planning; the specialized language of technical, science-based courses and laboratories; the need to formulate individual goals; and the selection process used by college admissions officers. The paper concludes by outlining the reading and academic skills developed throughout the course and by discussing the use of questions, vocabulary exercises, and famous quotations to develop basic comprehension skills. (GT)

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# TEACHING COLLEGE SURVIVAL SKILLS IN HIGH SCHOOL

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## TEACHING COLLEGE SURVIVAL SKILLS IN HIGH SCHOOL

If you were to sit in with a group of college bound high school seniors in a RAP session you would find that invariably the conversation turns to college. Questions and comments like the following are typical:

"Where did you apply?"

"Have you been accepted yet?"

"When is your interview?"

"Did you get your teacher recommendations?"

"Do you think you'll commute?"

"I'm worried about living away....."

"I wonder what kind of a schedule I'll have....."

"Are the college texts harder than the ones we use in high school?"

"I really don't know how to take notes....."

These are some of the more serious concerns that seem to trouble college bound students - and as the senior year gets into full swing, these concerns and others like them are indeed commonplace.

It is because of these and other pressing needs of high school seniors that the course "Survival In College" was developed. The primary purpose of the course is to assist college-bound seniors in developing an efficient and organized approach toward college reading and study skills.

Since this was to be an entirely new course offering at Danvers (Massachusetts)High School, it was an integral part of the planning

stage to open up lines of communication and inform prospective seniors of the opportunity to enroll. It was at this point that good public relations with guidance personnel was involved. A special meeting was called for the express purpose of informing and acquainting the counselors with the course content. Highlights of the syllabus were also discussed in detail at this time. The counselors were asked to inform prospective students of the course in February of their junior year when they were completing their program request forms.

In addition, an attractive brochure was designed, printed, and distributed to evcry college-bound junior through homeroom classes. A brief summary of the course was outlined. Also included was a letter from Dr. Richard P. Santeusanio, - Director of Reading, inviting each student to weigh the merits of the course, and if interested, make a commitment by completing and tearing off a sign up return sheet that was included as part of the brochure.

The course is now offered each semester as an elective meeting every day for one-half year. It is considered a major course and offers 2½ credits upon successful completion. The course has grown at a rapid rate, from its original enrollment of fourteen students in one section, to its present 110 students in four sections.

Some of the success can, most certainly, be attributed to word-of-mouth testimony from satisfied students, and the obvisous fact that needs are being met and reading study skills are being acquired, mastered, and put to use in other content areas.

Likewise, parents have expressed satisfaction with their childrens' progress as well as with the course content. Here are

some quotes from parents which were printed in a newspaper article about the course.

"It was a very worthwhile experience for my child."

"It was generally excellent and well worth the effort."

"I wish my older children had had an opportunity to take a similar course."

"It's well worth it to kids going on. It gives them a first-hand view of what to expect in college."

We will now highlight the actual course content. The basic texts include:

How to Study in College, by Walter Pauk published by Houghton-Mifflin;

The College Lecture Tape Series, by Allan Sack and Jack Yourman, published by The College Skills Center; and

Mastering Reading Skills, by Sidney Rauch and Alfred Weinstein, published by American Book Co.

Mrs. Margaret Richter, instructor of the course, also generates a myriad of teacher-made and supplementary commercial materials.

Each student is given a formal pre-and post-test in the McGraw-Hill Basic Skills System.

The test is developed in two forms, A and B, and divided into three major areas of reading instruction: reading rate and comprehension, skimming and scanning, and paragraph comprehension. The test results are shared and evaluated with students and areas of strength and weakness are identified.

The course content concerns itself with evaluating skills in many areas. A primary area involves listening to lectures and

mastering note-taking techniques. The program aims at developing the following:

1. a habit of systematic listening;
2. an organized method of notetaking and techniques used to review those notes;
3. a strengthened sense of the structure of communication; and
4. familiarity with techniques for handling related study skills such as reference books, literary works, textbooks, and memory of details.

Students listen to taped lectures of real-life college lecture situations where an effort to preserve the spontaneity is made so that the lecturer's original talk - his incomplete sentences or hesitations in delivery or extraneous background noises - remain unchanged. The lecturers are all currently teaching in college. The substantive content of the taped lectures deals with other communication problems - talking and writing - and also offers the student introductory information in a wide spectrum of college level fields, including explanations of basic concepts that the student will meet repeatedly in college.

The overall note-taking program has essentially three stages.

One: A control Lecture and Pre-Test to measure the student's present ability to absorb lecture material.

Two: Sufficient practice in several methods of note-taking such as the Sack-Yourman and the Cornell techniques. Objective tests based upon the lecture content are given with 24 to 48 hours after hearing the lecture. Grades are recorded and daily progress is evaluated by both student and instructor.

Three: Final evaluation is made by comparing results of a final control lecture and post-test with pre-test results.

Development of college level vocabulary is another paramount area of attention. A weekly vocabulary list of words college-bound seniors should master is assigned. Part of the testing procedure includes spelling, meaning, and usage of words in context. Vocabulary from required SAT lists as well as from the various content areas are also included.

The entire topic of studying for and taking college exams receives much emphasis during the course. Similarities and differences to high school testing procedures are examined and noted. Objective tests and essay style exams are explored, and highlights of test taking techniques and preparation is the subject of the topic chosen by guest lecturer Dr. Richard P. Santeusanio, in his presentation "Hints for Taking College Exams."

Several other guest lecturers visit during the term, and students are expected to take notes and apply what is presented to an essay question in the mid-term exam.

The entire area of scheduling and organizing time is a major issue with many college freshmen. The question, "Where does all the time go?" is approached in several ways. Students are encouraged to program their time in order to "gain" extra time.

First a master schedule is drawn, that is, a schedule of activities that are fixed, such as courses, classes, and labs. Added to this are other regular activities, such as a part-time job, commuting time, sports, and regular meetings. Last, but not least, the housekeeping chores, sleeping, and eating are included.

With the master schedule as a base, students devise any type of

schedule that fits their unique combination of courses, job commitments, and their personality. It is up to each individual student to adapt the principles of schedule building to his unique circumstances rather than to adopt some ideal model which fits hardly anybody.

The schedule for each person is the one that works. With time and experience, schedules can be refined until one can be almost perfect.

Systematic study is enhanced by practiced planning - the intelligent use of time is a large part of academic success. Planning time wisely and then, following through on the plans that were made is certain to free the mind, make studying enjoyable, promote cumulative review, eliminate the wrong type of cramming, control the study break, raise the level of recreational efficiency and regulate daily living.

The pros and cons of dormitory and commuter life is another area of concentration. At this point in the course, Ms. Kaye Tinkelman, Health Co-ordinator for Danvers, is called upon to share her expertise in her field and related areas in a lecture entitled, "Keeping Your Priorities in Balance - Physical, Mental, Social, Environmental - As They Relate to Study Skills." All aspects of college life are covered in this discussion. Students ask questions anonymously on 3 x 5 cards, and all topics are handled candidly. Some of the topics discussed are the uses and abuses of alcohol and drugs, coed living, sexual relations, feelings of loneliness, and issues related to self.

College students who return home during semester breaks or holiday vacations have also been asked to come to the class and

share experiences with the group. Especially helpful are discussions with former Danvers High School students who are now actively involved in campus life as dormitory resident advisors or student activity leaders. These discussions add another dimension to the course which is most revealing and worthwhile.

The Guidance Department is called upon to present Financial Aid information to the class and to make the students aware of the necessity of financial planning and alternative methods of supplementing the fiscal and monetary burden of higher education. Mr. David Pauley, Guidance Counselor at Danvers High, explains the complexities of financial aid to the seniors, and he and the other counselors are on call to provide the supportive services necessary in this and other vital areas.

The discipline of technical, science based courses and labs as reflected in specialized vocabulary, organizational patterns, and disciplined study habits is the topic of discussions by Dr. Richard Cooper who is Director of Science and Math in the Danvers Public Schools. He discusses science from a scientist's point of view, emphasizing that the language of science is precise rather than esoteric. He talks about the need to develop a critical attitude, particularly in writing lab reports and he outlines the principles related to the scientific method. Most important for students to remember is to make all findings understandable to the reader and that the principles of good written communication are not something to be tucked away, but are among the most essential tools of today's scientists and scholars.

Another guest speaker includes the Director of Music and Media Services in the Danvers Public Schools, Dr. Al Tatarunis. He

discusses aspects of college life from several view points, including that of an educator who recently returned to the college campus to complete a doctoral program. He also presents the point of view of a parent of college age students and finally that of an educator who has taught in several local colleges. While his lecture touches upon many bases, his main theme is the need for students to make personal commitments to goals set and established on an individual basis.

The appearance of a college admissions counselor provides the class with some understanding of the selection process used for admissions and precisely what is involved in this extremely sensitive area. The personal interview, candidates essay, SAT scores, scholarship need; academic and extra-curricular profile, teacher recommendation, and the cause/effect relationship of each of these areas is carefully explored.

Visits to local college campuses are scheduled so that students may actually sit in on several classes and fully participate for a day in the life of a "typical" college freshman.

Throughout the entire course, reading, selections, and exercises are used to bolster the following:

1. Supportive Skills, including
   - Concentration
   - Memory
2. The Basic On-Going Skills of
   - Precise Vocabulary and
   - General Reading Skills
3. The Academic Skills including
   - Note-taking,
   - Textbook Mastery,

Studying for exams,

Taking exams and

Writing papers

4. The Specialized Skills of

Math/

Science/

Public Speaking/ and

Foreign Language Mastery

Articles and selections with application to the content areas have been chosen for their readability, interest appeal, and realistic relationship to college work and everyday life. Before the students read each article, they are required to read a paragraph about the selection designed to stimulate interest and provide a purpose for reading.

To help students understand and interpret what they read, thought provoking and stimulating questions concerned with the following basic comprehension skills are used.

a. recognizing main idea

b. recalling important details

c. identifying the author's structure and intent and

d. making inferences

Vocabulary lists and exercises especially applicable to the content area fields are always included, in order to prepare the reader to bring more meaning to the various subject areas. These are intended as introductory materials that will eventually extend to a more comprehensive and enveloping interest in the field.

Discussion and analysis of famous quotations and proverbs are most effective in teaching two basic comprehension skills: recog-

nizing the main idea and making inferences. At the same time, they provide an excellent motivation for class discussion. Almost everyone is able to bring some experience or information to the subject and hopefully, students after having been exposed to certain authors and their writings, will wish to seek out more information and thus be stimulated to personal independent reading.

It is important that students react both intellectually and emotionally to the content and eventually use the ideas encountered to modify their own thinking. Reading must become for these students, an active, alert thinking process. Students must also realize that no one can guarantee improvement in reading. There are too many variables involved - intellectual, physical, social, and emotional. The most important factor is the individual student, who must want to improve and be willing to work hard to achieve that objective. Once that objective is attained, the student will then possess a skill that will make college work more meaningful and thus s/he will be provided with countless hours of pleasure and enlightenment.